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THE ART OF DELEGATION

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THE ART OF DELEGATION

by Douglas S. Fletcher and Ian M. Taplin

The basics of delegation have not changed. Delegation is the process for empowering workers with decision-making authority. Because organizations are moving to team-based structures, operating decisions are being pushed to lower levels. Therefore, understanding the principles, concepts, and mechanics of delegation is vital for today's professional manager.

With the advent of teams, downsizing, and fewer levels and increased numbers of direct reports, the kind of work that managers are being asked to do is changing. In the past, the command and control style of management fostered top-down task assignments in hierarchical organizations. This, however, is not delegation. Today, lateral coordination among cross-functional teams is accelerating. This requires upper management to delegate to these teams. Given this trend, the work a manager does needs to be clearly defined. It can be broken down into four categories.

- 1. Technical Work** - This is the work a manager's position requires. The manager must do this work; it cannot be delegated to others. Discipline-specific, like engineering, marketing, and accounting, this work requires that the manager make the final technical decision.
- 2. Team Work** - This has become increasingly important as alliances, partnerships, and task force assignments occupy more of a manager's time. The interpersonal skills of leadership and communication fall into this category. Leadership is the ability to influence others, whether direct reports or peers. It is the ability to inspire, motivate, and get the team to see and follow a vision. Managers' ability to communicate - that is, to articulate their message in writing or orally - enhances their ability to influence others.

- 3. Management Work** - This is a process

skill that can be learned and is necessary for delegation. Managers could do everything themselves - and they usually do when starting a business or taking over a new position. But as the business grows, both the technical work of the unit and the management of others require delegation. When this is done, decision making is pushed to lower levels and becomes the operating work of the unit. Managers leverage their effectiveness by planning, coaching, and reviewing the work of others. Ultimately, their job is to get work done through and with others.

- 4. Operating Work** - This is the work others do but for which the manager is still accountable. When work is delegated to lower levels it becomes operating work. As the size and complexity of a business increases, the need to delegate operating decisions, which were once made at the top, becomes vital to leverage and sustain growth. For example, day-to-day operating decisions about what need to be done and problems that need resolution once decided at the top can and should be pushed down to the teams of people actually doing the work. Pricing decisions, who gets what office and what furniture, staffing decisions, and the like, could and should be pushed downwards.

Whenever a group of people work together, there must be some process of sharing work and decision making. This is why delegation is necessary.

THE THREE ELEMENTS OF DELEGATION

Delegation is the work a manager does to *entrust responsibility and authority* to others and to create new *accountability* for results. Delegation is not the abdication of management responsibility or the

mere assignment of tasks. Neither is it synonymous with empowerment. Empowerment is a *concept* about sharing authority. Delegation is a *process* that ensures people are empowered. Empowerment defines a management style. To be successful, managers must entrust others with the responsibility to do their work and the authority to make any necessary decisions, thereby making them accountable for delivering the desired results. Let's take a closer look at the major elements of the delegation process.

Responsibility - When people don't know what to do, they do whatever makes most sense to them. This is why it is critical to define the job. To clarify the delegation of responsibility, the first requirement is to distinguish between assigning work to a *person* and assigning work to a *position*. During the early stages of organizational growth, companies organize around people. They tend to assign work to the people they trust and who get the job done. Further, they permit direct reports to take on the work they prefer and, as a result, the content of the position tends to change with each new person.

As organizations mature, a better approach is to assign work to "the position." Then, whoever fills the position assumes the obligation to do the work. In mature organizations, it is typical to find a succession of highly capable people marching in and out of positions over the years, with little change in the basic responsibilities of the position. Assigning work to a position increases efficiency, reduces friction, and gives every person - not just a few selected individuals - an opportunity to grow in the job. *Responsibility is the work, job, tasks, etc., assigned to, and made a continuing part of, a position.* A typical job description is a list of

these tasks.

Authority - People will not perform much work unless they can make decisions related to it. For example, if team members must go to the quality control manager every time they want to make a decision regarding product quality or to the plant manager to get approval for a change in the production schedule, they will spend most of their time checking, and all involved will not get much done. Again, if machine operators must go to the foreman every time they want to start or stop their machines or reposition their work, they will spend most of their time talking with the foreman. The solution in each case is for the people doing the work to make as many decisions related to that work as possible.

The more leeway people have (within certain control limits) to get the work done - including the making of decisions - the more efficiently they will work. In addition, those doing the work will demand much less of upper management's time. As an added bonus, they are more likely to be motivated and get more personal satisfaction from doing the work, ensuring optimum quality of worklife. *Authority is the amount of decision making assigned to a position.*

Accountability - Managers are ultimately accountable for whatever is delegated. The manager could check everything personally, but that would take too much time. Moreover, micro-management tends to antagonize people. No one likes having a manager continually peering over his or her shoulder. The professional manager can solve this control problem by (1) establishing limits within which work is done and decisions are made and (2) ensuring that the obligation for results is within those limits. This means managers must make sure that those who report to them *understand* the job, *accept* the responsibilities it entails, and are *committed* to deliver the desired

THE 3 ELEMENTS OF DELEGATION

1. **Responsibility** - the work, job, tasks, etc., assigned to, and made a continuing part of, a position.
2. **Authority** - the amount of decision making assigned to a position.
3. **Accountability** - the obligation to deliver the desired end results in exchange for decision-making

results (U/A/C). *Understanding* requires discussing the actual work to be done, why it is necessary, and how it ties into larger organizational goals. *Acceptance* means that direct reports are willing and able to do the work and make decisions. The measure of *commitment* is the actual results achieved.

To summarize, through the delegation process, managers create new accountability, but they are still accountable, just as boards of directors and CEOs -following in the tradition of Harry Truman, who said, "The buck stops here" - are ultimately accountable, too. *Account-ability is the obligation to deliver the desired end results in exchange for decision-making authority.*

THE SIX PRINCIPLES OF DELEGATION

There is more to delegating than assigning work and authority. To be effective delegators, managers must learn to plan, coach, and review. To that end, they must understand the six basic principles of delegation.

1. **The more people to whom a person reports, the less accountable he or she becomes.** This is especially true in matrix organizations, where a person is assigned to a team yet maintains ties to a functional department. If a team member is accountable to two different entities, confusion, contradiction, and inefficiency will result. Workers who report to two different entities (the team and a functional manager) are never quite sure of what

priority each job has. The direction from the two different sources may conflict. Too often, the solution is to play off one against the other so that the individual has enough freedom to get the job done.

The first principle of delegation is not applicable in young and emerging organizations experiencing rapid growth. Here, people do whatever needs to be done, taking direction from multiple sources in a frantic effort to stay ahead of growth. When stability is needed,

delegation is required and then this principle applies. In a team environment, commitments must be made to the team. The functional department manager becomes like a "homeroom teacher" to the team, responsible for training and development, career planning, and recommendations for transfers and promotions, but not for overseeing the performance of daily

duties.

2. **The effectiveness of delegation is limited by the willingness and ability of people to do the work and make the decisions required.** Managers often assume that once delegated, work will be carried out effectively. But people can limit delegation by their unwillingness or refusal to do the work or to make the required decisions. People are *willing* if they look forward to the challenge. Willingness is a can-do attitude. The concept of *ability* is tied to skill.

What can be done when workers don't know what to do or how to do it? Motivation and

THE 6 PRINCIPLES OF DELEGATION

1. The more people to whom a person reports, the less accountable he or she becomes.
2. The willingness and ability of people to do the work and make the decisions required limit the effectiveness of delegation.
3. The less authority people have, the more difficult it is for them to assume their responsibilities.
4. The more complete the accountability of individuals, the more effective the focus of control.
5. Delegation is limited by the availability of effective controls.
6. Offering constructive disagreement with loyal support of the final decision builds two-way communication and better decisions.

training are the answers. When good work is done or decisions yield successful results, generous praise properly placed will encourage further constructive effort. If efforts fall short, training is called for. This principle ties back to U/A/C. People will be committed only if they understand why the work needs to be done. Further, they will accept the work if they feel they have the ability to handle it and won't fail.

3. **The less authority people have, the more difficult it is for them to assume their responsibilities.** Although the degree of authority conferred on subordinates depends on their competence, too often delegated authority is not commensurate with responsibility. That is, individuals or teams are not given the authority to make decisions related to the work they do. When this is the case, the manager inevitably makes many of their decisions. This not only overloads the manager, but also devalues the jobs of direct reports.

If people are not allowed to make decisions, their interest in their work will be reduced. Putting someone else's ideas into effect is not motivating. Indeed, most of us find it more difficult to do things the way somebody else requires rather than in a way we think best. Individuals or teams that are given commensurate authority make and carry out their own decisions. In the process, they secure an emotional ownership in what is being done. This is one of the best ways to maintain interest and ensure productive effort.

This principle establishes the importance of delegating authority as close to the operating level as possible. The closer to the point of action a decision is made, the more effective the decision making tends to be.

4. **The more complete the accountability, the more effective the focus of control.** This means managers must be able to hold

individuals accountable for discipline-specific methods and the team accountable for the end results. To delegate effectively, managers must assume total accountability for everything that occurs under their supervision. They will do this only if they know that they are responsible for coaching and developing people to reach their core competencies. Getting help and service from the corporate training department or from outside consultants is appropriate, but final accountability rests with them. Complete accountability makes it possible for errors and deficiencies to be pinpointed quickly, and prevents people from passing the buck. Team accountability is the by-product of each individual's accountability. When each individual fulfills his or her commitment, then the team goal is realized.

5. **Delegation is limited by the availability of effective controls.** Managers can assign work and authority only if they have a means of making sure that the work is done properly and that decisions are carried out within set limits. This principle reinforces the importance of establishing effective controls.

The most effective controls are based on performance standards and control limits around those standards. The area within the control limits defines where the person doing the work is to make decisions. Results outside the control limits are called *exceptions*. In these situations, decision-making authority reverts back to the next higher level, which is ultimately accountable in the first place. Managers can use control limits as guard rails; direct reports can use them to track their own performance.

6. **Offering constructive disagreement with loyal support of the final decision builds two-way communication and better decisions.** If people are to do the best possible job for the manager to whom they report, they may have to occasionally disagree with that manager. The person actually doing the work can see it more clearly than the supervisor can and, thus, will have better-defined views of immediate operating needs. Because of the difference in

viewpoint, direct reports may disagree with the manager about how to do the job and the decisions to be made.

It is an important part of every person's job to disagree when necessary and to encourage disagreement on the part of direct reports. To be constructive, however, this disagreement should be

WHAT TO DELEGATE:

- Operating Work
- Routine and Detail
- Certain Management Tasks

WHAT NOT TO DELEGATE:

- Final Management Decisions
- Decisions on Overall Operating Problems
- Work that Subordinates Cannot Perform Effectively

offered in terms of the technique of loyal opposition, outlined in the box on page 9.

WHAT TO DELEGATE AND WHAT NOT TO DELEGATE

Managers must learn to assign to others all the operating work that could and should be done at lower levels, all routine and detail work, and certain management tasks.

Operating Work - Most non-management work can be delegated, for this is the work subordinates are paid to perform. Sales managers, for example, delegate all selling possible to salespeople, while continuing to plan, coach, and review the sales effort and lead the salespeople.

Since managers are often specialists in the technical work they supervise, the manager may be the only one in a given group qualified to perform certain aspects of operating work. The purchasing manager, for example, may be an expert in value analysis, or the industrial engineer in cycle time analysis. When this is the case, the manager does the technical work for as long as necessary, but should always be

ready to delegate the work. This, however, can be difficult to do in a downsized organization where there are few middle management positions to delegate to. In this case, the manager might consider outsourcing. When managers outsource, they must remember to manage their vendors. In effect, they delegate to them and, therefore, must plan, coach, and review their work.

Routine and Detail - Managers should concentrate on unique actions - that is, work that must be done differently each time it is performed. If they do not consciously delegate routine and detail tasks, those tasks will monopolize their time and crowd out their unique position accountability.

Certain Management Tasks - Teams may be able to handle the detail, routine, and repetitive portions of planning and reviewing as well as or better than managers. Further, staff groups can handle such things as preliminary budgets, cost analysis, and cash-flow projections. In selecting people, the human resources department can do most of the preliminary recruiting and interviewing for the manager. The general rule is to delegate everything possible relating to management work except the initiation - that is, seeing to it that the work gets under way and is carried through with the necessary vigor - and the final review of results.

Managers can safely delegate everything but the work and authority of their position. Managers should never delegate final management decisions, decisions on overall operating problems, and technical work that subordinates cannot perform effectively.

Final Management Decisions - Managers of an operating unit can never safely delegate final decisions on the overall plans of the unit. They also must reserve for themselves final decisions on overall controls, organization, and strategic leadership. If they permit others to make these decisions for them, they are abdicating the responsibility of their position, not delegating.

Making the final decision does not mean doing the day-to-day work. Managers should require the accountable individuals or teams to develop their own recommendations to the point where the managers must only study the prepared alternatives and make the final decision. If they wish to test

individual viewpoints, they can do this through discussion. If managers find themselves deeply involved in collecting information, sifting through data, or screening facts relating to final management decisions, they should search out subordinates or staff agencies to handle these responsibilities.

Decisions on Overall Operating Problems - Problems will arise concerning the operations work being carried out by teams and direct reports. When these problems involve two or more units or the team as a whole, the manager must reserve the right to make the final decision after trying to achieve consensus. This enables the top manager to consider all points of view and the requirements and prior decisions of higher levels of management and of staff groups with which only the manager may have had contact.

Upper management must encourage direct reports and teams to coordinate operating as well as management problems to the point of final decision. But when relying so heavily on others, the manager must anticipate that personal preferences and even bias may color their recommendations. The manager's best safeguard is to test the validity of both facts and assumptions by careful questioning.

Work that Subordinates Cannot Perform Effectively - If people do not have the capability or are not trained to do the work, delegation will not be successful. Particularly when new work is introduced, managers must do the work themselves, have it done by staff groups, or see to it that direct reports are trained. The most common approach is for managers to do the new work the first time. As soon as they become familiar with it, they train and coach others who could and should do the work. This has the advantage of making managerial supervision more effective. Managers must be always on the alert for reverse delegation. This is when direct reports who are fearful of making decisions try to put the monkey back on the boss, who is often too willing to take it.

THE TEN STEPS TO EFFECTIVE DELEGATION

Managers who want to delegate effectively can start by following these steps.

1. **Provide the proper climate for delegation.**

Have delegation of authority articulated as *empowerment* and a part of the organization's strategic plan. Delegation must begin at the top. Upper managers must remember that at one time somebody demonstrated faith in their ability by giving them their first opportunity to learn how to do the work and make decisions. Every manager should be willing to give others a chance to fail. When people are delegated challenging work and are given broad authority to make decisions, they have a sense of guiding their own destiny and can enjoy a feeling of real accomplishment when efforts are successful.

People who are given authority are certain to make mistakes. Some of these will be unimportant, others will be significant. Keep in mind that the best way for an intelligent person to learn is to make mistakes and profit from the experience. Patience is the key word here. Manage your staff members' discovery, for this is the best kind of learning. Also discuss mistakes with them. Be sure they have figured out how to prevent the same mistake again. Then give them their heads once more. If the mistake is serious, you may have to recall delegation for a time. But remember that you will have to train subordinates or end up doing much of their work for them.

2. **Recognize and deal with the barriers to delegation.**

Managers often fail to delegate because of psychological and organizational barriers. Psychological hurdles arise when managers are afraid to delegate. They may fear that subordinates will not do the job properly and, as a result, they will look bad. Although this fear is justified if subordinates are untrained or poorly motivated, the managers' responsibility is to take positive action to overcome such deficiencies.

Managers may also be reluctant to delegate because they expect subordinates to do their work and make decisions precisely as they, the managers would. Managers must recognize the fact that, given the proper encouragement and training, people can develop many different ways of doing the same job effectively. On the flip side, managers may balk at delegation because they worry that subordinates may do their work too well and, hence, outshine them. This fear overlooks the fact that the most valuable skill a manager can possess is the ability to develop people who, in some respects, are more capable than their manager. Good coaches are one of the rarest and most valuable assets in any organization.

Organizational barriers, such as failure to define responsibility and authority, also may block delegation. If managers do not know what work to perform and do not understand the degree of their authority, they will not be able to delegate parts of this responsibility and authority. Corrective action here involves clear and precise definition of the managerial position's responsibility and authority.

3. **Define responsibility, authority, and accountability.** The responsibility, authority, and accountability of each position should be defined in writing. This helps clarify for both the superior and the subordinate the work that is to be done, the decisions that are to be made, and the results to be accomplished. Written statements enable managers to determine whether the workload is properly balanced: whether one individual or component has too much work, another too little. They help eliminate unnecessary work and are an important means of control, for when managers specifically know what results people or teams are expected to accomplish, they can best hold them to account for achieving them. These written position guides also help clarify each person's responsibilities, making it possible for individuals to develop their own area of work and authority as fully as

they are capable, while preventing subordinates from overlapping the work assigned to others.

Most difficulties in definition arise from the attempt to define *how* a job is to be performed. A better approach is to spell out what is to be done and to specify this in terms of control limits for key performance measures. Instead of attempting to pin down each decision a manager can make, it is much better to outline the limits of authority within which the accountable person or team can make any decisions necessary.

4. **Clarify performance standards.** To be effective, accountability must be based on clear, understandable, and measurable performance standards for the job's key performance indicators. These are the areas where work is repetitive and can be measured. If managers have not developed project plans or goals that are understood and accepted by the people who report to them, it will be difficult to hold those individuals to account. Before delegating, managers should make sure that they have a good planning process and that clearly defined one-time project assignments guide the activities of subordinates and provide the yardstick against which performance can be measured.
5. **Establish a formal method of review.** Focus only on exceptions that are outside the agreed-upon control limits. Require corrective action plans that ensure that reverse delegation does not creep back, trapping upper management into making decisions that could easily be handled at lower levels.
6. **Create a training plan.** Assess the competency level of the incumbents in the jobs, concentrating on their skill level and ability to make final decisions. This will provide you with a gap analysis and a training needs assessment. Assess skill levels periodically and retrain individuals as necessary to ensure that competency levels are maintained.

7. Enlarge jobs in depth as well as breadth. The capacity of individuals increases as they become more proficient in their jobs, making them able to take on more complex and demanding work. When this happens, managers should delegate new work to the most capable people. They should also encourage improvement in depth. Everybody can think of new and better ways of doing their jobs, reducing costs, and increasing efficiency. Encourage people to take on more decision-making authority and increase the creative and innovative opportunities in the job.

8. Reward outstanding performance. People who do a good job want to be told about it, and they

want others to know. The best source of this recognition is the manager. By giving credit freely, managers encourage repeat performance of the kind of outstanding work they want. Sooner or later, this recognition should be reflected in an increase in salary or other compensation. Increased delegation also can build morale among dissatisfied team members.

Giving people more important work to do and letting them make more important decisions clearly shows that you have confidence in them and helps them feel important.

9. Know when to recall delegation. When ability to perform diminishes, delegated authority and responsibility should be temporarily withdrawn until the situation improves. For example, when a new person comes into a position, the manager should withdraw certain aspects of responsibility and authority until the new incumbent has shown that he or she has the skill and ability to do the job. As the manager becomes confident of the new person's ability, the manager redelegates the responsibility and authority. Withdrawal of delegated responsibility and authority may also occur in cases of emergency, when new units are formed, or when a new manager enters a position. This ebb and flow of responsibility and authority are to be expected. However, the

manager should be aware of the human tendency to retain authority. Once the need for recall has passed, the supervising manager should redelegate the power to make decisions as completely as possible.

10. Continue coaching the organization toward a culture of delegation. For delegation to be effective, it must be part of a strategic intent. Therefore, top managers must articulate where the organization is currently and what it wants to evolve to. Moving from a top-down command and

control style to one requiring delegation of decision-making authority to lower levels and teams requires a conscious decision on the part of upper management. To have piecemeal delegation in parts of the organization and not in others confuses employees and reveals the lack of an overall and consistent management

THE 10 STEPS TO EFFECTIVE DELEGATION

- ◆ Provide the proper climate for delegation.
- ◆ Recognize and deal with the barriers to delegation.
- ◆ Define responsibility, authority, and accountability.
- ◆ Clarify performance standards.
- ◆ Establish a formal method of review.
- ◆ Create a training plan.
- ◆ Enlarge jobs in depth as well as breadth.
- ◆ Reward outstanding performance.
- ◆ Know when to recall delegation.

philosophy. By consciously extending delegation, organizations can evolve to excellence in a predictable manner.

Here are the steps:

* *Start easily.* Begin in the easiest manner by adopting the habit of requiring people to provide their own answers to each question they bring up. Practice this for a few weeks. Each time a question is presented to you, respond by asking, "What answer do you have?" or "What do you think?" This technique can reverse a great deal of upward delegation.

* *Require solutions, not problems.* As soon as you and your staff are in the habit of clarifying what should and could be decided at lower levels, go to the next most difficult area, that of problems and solutions. When a problem is presented to you, require a recommended solution before you give active help. This demands management judgment. In cases of emergency, you may have to act yourself. But gradually introduce the requirement, "Please let me have your recommendation," and you will find that this is a major step in improved delegation. The best way to ensure that this happens is to require subordinates to bring to you, on one sheet of paper, answers to these questions:

- ☐ What are the symptoms of the problem?
- ☐ What is the goal?
- ☐ What are the obstacles and root causes of the symptoms?
- ☐ What is the corrective action?

This makes subordinates think and positions you as the coach, not the final authority.

* *Discuss, don't decide.* You know part of your job is reviewing results. When people report to you or you are working with them, be careful to help them think matters through for themselves. By inference or by expressing a

THE TECHNIQUE OF LOYAL OPPOSITION

- * *Look at Both Sides.* Before disagreeing, find out what you are disagreeing with. This means finding out precisely what is the viewpoint or opinion of the other person. Questions are the best means of finding out, and they are most effective if asked in person. The skill here is listening.
- * *Make Disagreement Factual.* One's position should be limited to the facts and how it enhances or hinders progress toward the common goal. This is the art of differing, but only in the relationship to the common goal. Discuss the facts. Avoid criticizing people and personalities.
- * *Don't Look for Sympathizers.* When disagreeing with another person, especially the supervising manager, avoid banding together with others of a similar viewpoint. The attempt to find supporters and to build behind-the-scenes opposition to the boss's viewpoint is dangerous. It is one of the best ways to win a skirmish and lose the battle.
- * *Give Recognition.* If a person steadfastly supports a point of view contrary to the manager's and, in the process, requires the manager to reexamine his or her premises, that person has made a contribution to the manager's effectiveness. The best way to encourage more of the same is to give sincere recognition both for the loyal opposition and the spirit in which it was offered.
- * *Support the Final Decision.* The accountable manager's job is to weigh all the evidence, consider every viewpoint, and evaluate disagreements. Then the final decision can be made. Once the decision is made, everybody on the team must accept and support it. This is what consensus is all about. If there is still disagreement, it should be voiced in private to the accountable manager. To complain and criticize after the die has been cast is extremely destructive.

personal preference, you may make the decision for them without realizing it. For a time, the process of helping other people think for themselves will be frustrating both to you and to your direct reports. With perseverance, however, you will find that it is one of the most effective tools for easing the workload on yourself and for building confidence in others.

- * *Select your assignments carefully.* Begin with simple short projects or goals that can be achieved. You want people and teams to be successful. As they become more proficient, require completed work on longer and more complex assignments.
- * *Extend the checkpoints.* In the beginning, you will require people to check back with

you quite frequently. With practice, training, and confidence, you will find more and more that the check backs are abbreviated and are simply a means of keeping you informed of progress. When this occurs, you can minimize the person-to-person contacts and rely more on exception reporting.

Eventually you will reach the stage where check backs at a midpoint and at the completion of the job will be the normal procedure for projects. For operating KPIs, results outside control limits are your control mechanism. Once you have a mature team, weekly or monthly operating review meetings will become the norm for reviewing delegated authority for results.

DELEGATING TO TEAMS

The first reaction most new team leaders have is to take on more work. How else can you be sure your project, the most important assignment you've ever had, gets done right? Like all reflexes, the do-it-yourself model is also a substitute for thinking.

The biggest challenge for people is to let go of their work. You need to start getting solutions from other people. But it's easier to solve problems yourself because it's what you've always done.

Todd Conger, 30, fell into that trap soon after he became a team leader at Morton International, the airbag manufacturer based in Brigham City, Utah. Conger had spent two years in a production job. Last September, he became manufacturing process coordinator.

His first instinct was to help out. If he saw his 11-member team slipping behind schedule, he'd jump in and do the work himself. But the more work he did, the less work seemed to get done — and the less motivated his team became. They'd return late from breaks and wait for specific instructions before tackling obvious problems. Why? Conger's "help" was offending his colleagues. "I thought I was helping when I'd hurry and pack some parts for them," he says. "But they thought I was telling them they weren't working fast enough: 'Look, I can do it faster than you.'"

Conger learned quickly what every leader learns eventually. Your job is not to do the work your team is supposed to do. Your job is to provide the tools, motivation, and direction the team needs to do the work itself. The lesson is simple, and all too easy to ignore: never do what could and should be delegated.

"Manage the process, don't manage the content," urges Anne Donnellon, a professor at Babson College and author of *Team Talk* (HBS Press, 1996). The real work of a leader involves "agendas and information flows," she says. "Too many leaders try to control the details of work. They think of themselves as 'doers,' which encourages team members to assume less responsibility."

Managing content as well as process can do more than drain your team's motivation. It can be downright draining, as Intuit's Brian Ascher discovered. There simply weren't enough hours in the day to attend to his new responsibilities and keep his hand in the details of software code. "As project manager I'm responsible for getting the product scoped out, launched, positioned, and targeted," he says. "My biggest challenge was prioritizing all the things coming at me: What can I say no to? What can I delegate down? What can I delegate up? What needs to be decided today?"

Ascher applied an engineering mind-set to his challenge. He identified the three factors most critical to the success of Quicken for Windows. Then every morning, as he reviewed his To-Do list, he'd decide which action items contributed to those success factors and which didn't. He worked on those that did and assigned the others to one of his 15 engineers.

"I was spending an excessive amount of time on little things that didn't relate to my major goals," Ascher says. "I had to ask myself: 'How do I meet the needs of people on the team who want help without spending my own time on it?'"

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